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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000396

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SUBJECT: Guinean National Assembly to Address Electoral Bills, Prep
for Legislative Elections

REF: Conakry 155

¶1. (SBU) Summary. As the Guinean National Assembly begins its annual 45-day session, the details of the 2007 legislative elections are both a matter of focus and very much in flux. Four bills on the electoral process, negotiated during the political dialogues of the ad hoc committee last August-September, are before the legislature. Some members, of both the majority and opposition, believe the new Minister of Internal Affairs and Security should be permitted to review the draft legislation; members of the opposition would also like to reopen two of the bills given the new political climate. That said, these bills are likely to move forward through the legislative process over the next few weeks.

¶2. (SBU) Opposition members plan to propose that large numbers of local officials, now centrally appointed, should become elected positions in order to provide better assurance that electoral reforms are carried out. They seek to implement this change, which would require constitutional amendment, before any legislative elections. Even if this proposal fails, as it is likely to in the near term, ruling and opposition legislators agree, and the donor community concurs, that Guinea will not be prepared to hold legislative elections by their scheduled June 2007 date, if such elections are to be free and fair. End Summary.

PUP says June 2007 is too soon for elections

¶3. (SBU) State and USAID officers, along with other donors' technical staff, met April 2 with Elhadj Banire Diallo, chair of the majority party PUP's parliamentary committee to discuss the status of 2007 legislative election preparations. Noting that he is a professor of statistics and probability, Diallo said his formal training and life experience tell him Guinea will not hold legislative elections in June 2007.

¶4. (SBU) there are four electoral bills before the current session. If passed, these would modify the electoral code; define the status of opposition parties; finance political parties, and create an independent national electoral commission (CENI) to co-administer the elections with the government.

¶5. (SBU) Diallo said some National Assembly members, including members of his own party, want the new Minister of Internal Affairs and Security, Beau Keita, to review the draft legislation and present it to the new cabinet, as was done by his predecessor. Diallo, while not wholly opposed, feared another revision would further delay the legislative elections, which most Guineans and international observers already agree cannot take place in June, as scheduled. The draft legislation was to be presented to the plenary session of legislature in December 2006. Civil unrest and strikes

in January and February of this year further prevented any special session.

Opposition Trying for More

¶16. (SBU) The donor group also met with Ousmane Bah, parliamentary group chair of opposition party Union pour le Progres et le Renouveau (UPR). UPR is the only opposition political party currently represented in the National Assembly, so Bah served as informal spokesman for all the opposition parties in this forum. Bah claimed the opposition has not yet had a chance to debate the draft legislation in plenary, but conceded that most opposition party members would support it if it were put up for a vote. (Comment: So far, the bills on the agenda have not come up for parliamentary action, so it is not certain if, as Bah seems to fear, PUP will curtail debate. In any event, his party, along with other opposition members, was involved in negotiating the texts of these bills in mid-2006. Bah told us in a lunch at the Ambassador's in late March, however, that he wanted to seize the opportunity of a new government to reopen the texts for further negotiation, seeing the opposition in a stronger position now).

¶17. (SBU) Bah outlined concerns regarding financing the CENI. The draft legislation calls only for the creation of the body, and not financing. Bah said he sought to ensure the CENI financing would be on the agenda for the first budgetary session. (Note: As of this writing, the item is not/not on the agenda for the first budgetary session, but that session is delayed in any event since the budget has not yet been submitted.)

Local Representation is Key to Reform

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¶18. (SBU) Bah argued electoral reforms can not be fully carried out unless there is direct representation at the local level. Therefore, he seeks to have positions that are now centrally appointed by the executive (chef de quartier and chef du district) become elected positions. Bah said ensuring that these positions are elected will ensure accountability, and prepare the base for broader electoral reforms. The opposition wants this concession in place before legislative elections, even if the administration of the concession necessitates delaying the elections until 2008, or beyond.

¶19. (SBU) The donor group cautioned Bah that reforming the electoral process should be a work in progress; otherwise, significant delay and obstacles could arise. The world and the Guinean people themselves were watching and would not appreciate lost momentum. (Note: at the biweekly G-8 ambassadorial meeting April 10, participants concurred that donors should push back on this opposition initiative. The bills negotiated last fall should go forward, we agreed, and legislative elections should not await revamping Guinea's entire administrative structure. That said, the G-8 reps agreed that preparations for the legislative elections would require a delay of several months from June.)

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) The donor community has speculated that Guinea would not be prepared for legislative elections in June 2007. That members of the National Assembly are openly saying so is not surprising. The opposition is clearly feeling its oats. The Prime Minister and his team will need to meet their commitment for ongoing political dialogue to design a path forward that adequately addresses all parties' concerns.

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